DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 193 787 EA 013 055

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TITLE The Origin of Ohio Households' Opinions About Public Education.
INSTITUTION Appalachia Educational Lab., Charleston, W. Va.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.: Ohio State Dept. of Education, Columbus.
PUB DATE Oct 79
NOTE 55p.: Summary findings of a survey. Some pages may not reproduce clearly due to light print of original document.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education: *Information Sources: *Public Education: *Public Opinion: School Community Relationship: School Surveys: *State Surveys
IDENTIFIERS Ohio

ABSTRACT

This document is a report of a jointly-sponsored project between the Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) and the Ohio department of education. The project was a statewide survey to determine how the Ohio public informs itself about public education and to identify factors contributing to the public's trust and confidence in education. The project included a review of the existing literature on how the public gets information about schools, design of a survey instrument for identifying how the Ohio public informs itself, and a statewide telephone survey of households. The report includes the results of the review and of the survey, and AEL's recommendations to the Ohio department of education about how to use the results. Perhaps the most important finding was that the strongest supporters of public education are the parents of children in the public schools. Since people without school-age children now outnumber parents of school-age children, it is argued that the primary task is to achieve more effective communication with the part of the population that does not have school-age children. (Author/IRT)

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THE ORIGIN OF OHIO HOUSEHOLDS' OPINIONS ABOUT PUBLIC EDUCATION

Summary Findings of a Survey Jointly-Sponsored and Conducted by the Appalachia Educational Laboratory and the Ohio Department of Education

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

October 1979

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author recognizes and extends appreciation to other major contributors to this research project. Dr. Victor Wall and Dr. Don Yoder of the Department of Communications, The Ohio State University, trained the interviewers and supervised interviewing and data analysis. Dr. Franklin B. Walter, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Ohio Department of Education, provided assistance in the overall completion of the project. Ms. Margaret Mauter, Ohio Department of Education, assisted in the project design and secured Department approval. Drs. Merrill Meehan and Jack Sanders, AEL colleagues, provided technical and editorial assistance throughout the drafting of this report. Ms. Marilyn Slack, AEL Research Assistant, helped with data aggregation. Ms. Kim Cowley and Mrs. Shirley Keene of AEL typed the draft and final reports.

INTRODUCTION

The Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Inc. (AEL) conducts research and development (R & D) and provides R & D services to educational agencies in its service region. This region includes Ohio and six other member-states: Alabama, Kentucky, Tennessee, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia.

One aspect of the Laboratory's R & D service to member-states is jointly sponsored, short-term projects with state departments of education (SDE). This project-oriented R & D is typically a collaborative effort designed to meet expressed educational needs of AEL's clients in state departments of education.

In the spring of 1978, personnel from AEL and the Ohio SDE agreed to conduct a survey of Ohio residents to assess how the Ohio public informs itself about public education. The work, conducted from June 1978 to November 1979, was supported partially by the National Institute of Education.

The purposes of the project were: (1) to determine how the Ohio public informs itself about public education in the State, and (2) to identify factors contributing to the Ohio public's trust and confidence in education. The project's tentative procedures included four essential steps. They were:

(1) Conducting a review of the existing literature on how the public gets information about schools;

(2) Designing a survey instrument to identify how the Ohio public informs itself about its schools;

(3) Conducting a survey of Ohio households using the instrument then analyzing the resultant data;

(4) Writing a report on the survey results with recommendations for future use by Ohio local education agencies (LEA's).

This report summarizes the joint research project by describing: the results of the literature review, the results of a statewide telephone survey of households, and AEL's recommendations to the Ohio SDE for future use of the survey by local school districts.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The Ohio SDE was primarily interested in finding ways to improve the public image of Ohio education. Ohio SDE personnel felt that a negative public view of education was due to a lack of sufficient, correct information on the part of the public regarding school programs. The Ohio SDE sought AEL's assistance in determining ways to improve the image of education by identifying (1) how the public gets information about education, and (2) factors that contribute to the public's trust and confidence in education.

AEL and the Ohio SDE agreed to design a survey questionnaire that would identify the sources of information the Ohio public most frequently consults in forming its attitudes toward public education. Identification of these most used and most credible sources would enable schools to use these sources to publicize programs more completely and effectively. The survey was to be administered first to a statewide sample of Ohio households. It would be adapted later for use by Ohio school districts. Administering the adapted survey in individual school districts would enable LEA's to identify specific information sources (i.e., media, types of persons, agencies and organizations) consulted by their publics. The content of the information from those sources could be studied by LEA's to

(1) assess the extent to which it and its schools were effectively communicating its educational program to the public, and (2) identify alternative ways for improving its communication with the public.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The following sources were consulted to identify related, published studies:

(a) ERIC Database

(b) National School Public Relations Association

(c) National Opinion Research Center

(d) Gallup Polls: 1969-1978

(e) 1978 NEA National Opinion Survey

(f) Hubbell and Associates

(g) Educational researchers known to the AEL or to the Ohio SDE staffs.

In searching the above sources, it was learned that little research has been done on the specific question of how the public informs itself about education. Hubbell and Associates, an educational research firm based in Port Huron, Michigan, routinely includes a few related items in the public opinion surveys it conducts for local school districts. However, its survey results are generalizable only to the school district involved and not to any larger population.

A study conducted by the National Education Association in 1978 provided some information on the question. In the NEA survey, a national cross-section of people 18 years or older was asked to identify sources of information about schools (Appendix A, Table 1). Newspapers, by far, were

the primary source of information, with 41 percent of the population indicating that they used newspapers to learn about their schools. Other major sources of information included children (mentioned by 30 percent), neighbors and friends (21 percent), and radio and TV (19 percent). Written reports of school officials (mentioned only by 7 percent) were among the least consulted sources of information about schools.

The annual Gallup Poll results on public attitudes toward education contain some items germane to this study. For example, the Gallup Poll results indicate that newspapers (other than by word of mouth) are the primary information sources. Newspapers were mentioned by 38 percent of respondents in 1969, and by 37 percent in 1979. Newspapers were followed by radio and TV: 16 percent in 1969, and 21 percent in 1979 (Appendix A, Table 2).

As far as can be determined from the literature search, this joint AEL-Ohio SDE project was the first attempt to survey a cross-section of households in an entire state regarding school information sources most frequently consulted by the public. The project's survey results provide the Ohio SDE with information useful for policy-making at the state level.

PROCEDURES

Basic Study Design

From April to November 1978 meetings, correspondence, and telephone communications between AEL and Ohio SDE personnel were directed toward developing the design of the project. From September to October, a

literature search identifying the results of previous, related studies was conducted by the AEL Regional Exchange. In January, 1979, agreement was reached on the survey methodology portion of the study. The basic metnodology involved a statewide telephone survey of randomly selected households. Respondents were asked questions regarding their trust and confidence in Ohio education and the information sources they consulted most often.

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument was developed from January 1979 through March 1979. AEL designed the survey questionnaire in consultation with the Ohio SDE staff and with Professor Victor Wall, AEL consultant at The Ohio State University (OSU). After several revisions, the questionnaire was field-tested with a sample of 30 Columbus, Ohio residents in early April, 1979. After field-testing, the instrument was revised again by AEL staff, Professor Wall, and Ohio SDE personnel. The final interview questionnaire contained 37 items.

Sample

The statewide sample for interviewing was drawn at random by the Polimetrics Laboratory at The Ohio State University. The Polimetrics Laboratory used a computer-based program called STATESAM to draw the random sample. As a data base for STATESAM all telephone numbers in Ohio are stored in the computer: this includes unlisted numbers normally unavailable for telephone surveys. Known places of business were deleted from the telephone number list; thus, the unit of measure for this survey is Ohio households as evidenced by their telephone numbers.

Through the computer-based STATESAM program, telephone numbers were randomly selected in accordance with the size of the sample being requested. The most populous counties (Cuyhoga, Hamilton, Franklin, and Montgomery) are stratified to ensure a proportionate representation. The remaining telephone numbers are randomly selected. Thus, the resultant sample represents an adequate random sample of households' telephones within the state of Ohio. As another type of check, analysis of the completed interview data revealed that 41 percent of survey respondents did report that they resided in the eight counties which represent 43 percent of Ohio's population. (See Appendix C.)

Interviewing

Interviewers were selected from students who were known by the project supervisors. There were eight graduate students from the OSU Department of Communications, two OSU undergraduate students, and one high school student. All interviewers but one had past, successful experience with interviewing and/or telephone surveys with the project supervisors.

Each interviewer was given approximately one hour of training before the telephone survey began. The training consisted of: (1) discussions of the purpose/objectives/rationale of the survey project, (2) an orientation to each of the questions on the interview questionnaire, (3) training in coding the interviewee's answers, and (4) a discussion of potential problems. In addition to this comprehensive training discussion, each interviewer practiced the interview with another interviewer in a supervised simulation activity.

Interviewers used telephones at the Ohio Department of Education offices in Columbus. The calls were made at various hours of the day, between 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. Interviewers tried each number a total of three times before abandoning it as a "no answer." The call backs were made at various times and on different days to increase the chances of finding someone at home. Survey telephone calls were made from July 10 to July 24, 1979.

The interview supervisor made random checks of interviewers' work. During these checks, the supervisor listened to calls the interviewer made, discussed any problems, checked the coding of the questionnaires, and discussed any improvements or changes the interviewer needed to make.

Since there was close supervision of the telephoning process, and since the interviewers were experienced people, no call backs for verification were made. However, the numbers listed by the interviewers as "called" were checked against the telephone bill to verify that they indeed had been called.

Interviewers obtained a 45 percent completion rate, or approximately one completed interview for every two completed calls. A total of 390 interviews was completed. This was more than the 383 needed to generalize to the population. Interview data were analyzed through the computer services available at OSU.

GENERAL FINDINGS

Respondents represented a variety of education and income levels, ages, and ethnic backgrounds. Forty-seven percent (47%) of the respondents had

children in school (Appendix A, Table 3). Fifty-six percent (56%) said they had visited a school during the past year (Appendix A, Table 4). Of those who reported attending a school-related function during the year, thirty percent (30%) noted that they attended for a music-related event, twenty-seven percent (27%) said it was a sports-related event, twenty-five percent (25%) stated it was a club meeting, and twenty-three percent (23%) cited a PTA/PTO meeting (Appendix A, Table 5). Least frequently attended school events included: graduation ceremonies (3%), classroom visitations (3%), board meetings (1%) and public information meetings (.5%) (Appendix A, Table 5).

Respondents were asked about their interest in learning about schools during the past year. Most respondents described themselves as moderately to highly interested. Forty percent (40%) said they had a moderate level of interest, and another forty percent (40%) said they had a high or very high level of interest in learning about schools (Appendix A, Table 6). The knowledgeability of respondents was tested by asking them to name their: (1) local district, (2) superintendent, and (3) principal. Eighty-nine percent (89%) reported they knew the name of their district; forty-four percent (44%) the superintendent; and forty-three percent (43%) the local school principal.

When asked to identify from a provided listing the ways in which they obtained information about schools, seventy-eight percent (78%) of the respondents mentioned newspapers, and seventy percent (70%) mentioned friends. These were followed by school publications (59%), radio (55%), TV (54%), and school staff (57%). Less frequently mentioned (but well used)

sources of information were: direct mail (48%), PTA/PTO (47%), and children in school (44%) (Appendix A, Table 7).

Respondents were asked to identify the single, most-used information source. Respondents most frequently mentioned the following as their primary information sources: newspapers (mentioned by 19% of respondents); school-age children (16%); school publications (12%); and friends, relatives, and neighbors (12%). Least frequently mentioned were: direct mail (6%), TV (6%), and radio (4%) (Appendix A, Table 8).

When asked to identify the single information source from which they would prefer to receive all of their school information, respondents most frequently mentioned: school staff members/teachers (22%); newspapers (15%); and school publications, reports, and newspapers (12%). Least frequently mentioned were: friends, relatives, and neighbors (5%), TV (3%), and radio (3%) (Appendix A, Table 9).

Regarding the characteristics they valued most in a single information source, thirty-five percent (35%) of the respondents said they valued an information source that was accurate, valid, or reliable. They also indicated that they valued an information source that was available and convenient (16% of respondents), direct and first-hand (12%), and face-to-face (9%). Least frequently mentioned characteristics were: family source (3%), a print medium (3%), and live coverage (.5%) (Appendix A, Table 10).

When asked to rate the information they were receiving presently about schools, sixty-three percent (63%) said they received an adequate or very adequate amount of school information. Only twenty-one percent (21%) said they received an inadequate or very inadequate amount of information (Appendix A, Table 11).

In rating the accuracy of the information they had received during the past year, seventy percent (70%) of the respondents said they had received accurate or very accurate information. Only seven percent (7%) said they had received inaccurate or very inaccurate information (Appendix A, Table 12).

Respondents were asked to rate the quality of education offered by their local school district. Sixty percent (60%) said the district provided good or very good education. Only thirteen percent (13%) said the local district education was bad or very bad (Appendix A, Table 13). When asked to compare the quality of education in their local district to that provided in the United States generally, forty-two percent (42%) said the local district education was better or much better, while another forty-seven percent (47%) said it was neither better nor worse. Only eight percent (8%) indicated the quality was worse or much worse (Appendix A, Table 14).

In rating their trust and confidence in the nation's public eudcation system, twenty-six percent (26%) of respondents had high or very high trust and confidence, while forty-two percent (42%) had neither high nor low trust and confidence. Thirty-one percent (31%) said they had low or very low trust and confidence in the nation's public education system (Appendix A, Table 15).

Respondents were also asked to rate their trust and confidence in the Ohio public education system. Thirty-one percent (31%) rated these characteristics high or very high, and fifty-one percent (51%) rated them neither high nor low. Only fifteen percent (15%) rated them low or very low (Appendix A, Table 16). The Chi Square test indicates that respondents rated Ohio public education significantly higher than they rated education in the nation generally (x^2=177.349, df=25, p <.01).

In addition, respondents rated their trust and confidence in the local school district teachers, the local school administrators, and the local school board. A high or very high level of trust and confidence was reported by fifty percent (50%) of respondents in regard to teachers, forty-four percent (44%) in regard to LEA administrators, and thirty-seven percent (37%) in regard to school board members. For all three school categories, most of the remaining respondents expressed neither high nor low trust and confidence. These results are on the computer printouts but not included in a table in this report. A Chi Square test indicates that respondents placed a significantly higher degree of trust and confidence in local teachers over administrators (x^2=163.606, df=25, p <.01) and in administrators over school board members (x^2=410.766, df=25, p <.01).

Most respondents expressed a need for additional information about most categories presented to them. Seventy-six percent (76%) of respondents asked for more information about school board decisions, seventy-one percent (71%) for school budget information, sixty-seven percent (67%) for career education information, and sixty-six percent (66%) asked for regular classroom and the same for special education information. The less frequently requested (though still well-used) information categories were: student test score data (56%), adult and community education programs (55%), and class size (48%) (Appendix A, Table 17).

SIGNIFICANT INTERACTIONS

Respondents with School-age Children

Cross tabulations of survey data indicated that two variables were significantly associated with most of the responses: (1) whether or not the

respondent had school-age children, and (2) the respondent's interest in learning about schools. Further, these two variables were positively correlated (R=.12, p <.01), though not highly. Respondents with school-age children were significantly more interested in learning about school than those without children in school (x^2=49.580, df=8, p <.01).

Respondents with school-age children, when compared to those without school-age children, not only had higher interest in learning about schools (t=6.883, df=387, p <.001), but were also more knowledgeable about schools, i.e., a significantly greater number of respondents with school-age children were able to name the district superintendent and the local school principal.

Respondents with children in schools used different information sources than those with no school-age children (Appendix A, Table 18). Respondents with school-age children relied mainly on school-based information sources (their own children, school publications, and PTA), but they also read the newspapers for school-related information. Respondents without school-age children relied mainly on the mass media (TV, newspapers, and radio), in addition to receiving school-related information from friends.

When asked to identify the one source of information from which they would prefer to receive school-related information, respondents both with and without school-age children identified school-based information sources for the most part (Appendix A, Table 19). Respondents without school-age children also identified newspapers and friends as preferred information sources. Respondents with children in school ranked school staff first as a preferred single information source. Respondents without children in schools also ranked school staff high (second), but ranked newspapers first.

Respondents with school-age children, when compared to those without, rated the quality of education in the local school district significantly higher ($t=2.321$, $df=384$, $p<.05$). Also, they placed significantly more trust and confidence in Ohio public education than respondents without school-age children ($t=2.410$, $df=379$, $p<.05$).

Respondents' Attendance at School Functions

Survey results indicate that attendance at school functions was associated with favorable ratings of schools. Respondents who attended school functions, when compared to those who did not, were more interested in learning about schools ($t=8.467$, $df=388$, $p<.001$). They gave significantly higher evaluations of the quality of education in the local school district ($t=3.245$, $df=385$, $p<.01$). They rated local district education higher than education in the country generally ($t=2.231$, $df=375$, $p<.05$). They also demonstrated significantly higher trust in local administrators ($t=2.504$, $df=364$, $p<.05$), board members ($t=2.544$, $df=351$, $p<.05$), and teachers ($t=1.734$, $df=377$, $p<.05$, one-tailed test).

Respondents' Amount of School Information

While the respondents' evaluation of the amount of school information was not associated with whether or not they had school-age children, it was positively correlated to their interest in learning about schools. Respondents who said they received an adequate amount of information, when compared to those who said they had not received an adequate amount of information, had higher interest in learning about schools, rated the quality of education higher, and expressed a higher degree of trust and confidence in the national public school system, the Ohio school sytem, and in local administrators,

school board members, and teachers. However, the correlation coefficients ranged from positive .08 to .26 and, therefore, were not strong.

Respondents who reported an adequate amount of school information, when compared to those who reported an inadequate amount of information, also differed in the sources of school information they consulted. Those who felt themselves more informed reported a significantly higher use of the following sources: school staff, school publications, direct mail, and newspapers.

Respondents' Assessment of the Accuracy and Reliability of their School Information

While respondents' evaluation of the accuracy and reliability of their school information was not associated with whether or not they had school-age children, it was positively correlated to their interest in learning about schools. Respondents who reported a higher degree of information accuracy and reliability, when compared to those who did not, had a higher interest in learning about schools, rated the quality of local school education higher, and expressed a higher degree of trust and confidence in the U. S. public school system, in Ohio education, and in local administrators, school board members and teachers. However, these correlation coefficients were low.

Respondents who reported a high degree of information accuracy and reliability, when compared to those who did not, tended to use somewhat different information sources, including school publications, newspapers, and school staff sources--sources also used by respondents who reported a greater amount of school information.

DISCUSSION

There is little existing literature on the question of how the public informs itself about public education. However, AEL-Ohio SDE survey results support the very general findings of the few related studies that have been done. For example, national surveys (NEA and Gallup--see Appendix A, Tables 1 and 2) during the past ten years indicate that newspapers are the most-used source for school-related information. Ohioans also rated newspapers first as an important source: 78 percent of the sample noted that they used newspapers to inform themselves about schools. Neighbors and friends were the third most-mentioned information source in a 1978 NEA survey (mentioned by 70 percent of respondents). Radio and TV, mentioned frequently in the NEA (tied for 4th) and Gallup polls, also mentioned frequently in this survey (tied for 4th). Two major differences between existing survey results and the results of this survey are that: (1) the NEA poll indicates that children are the second most-consulted information source, while this survey found that children ranked seventh among information sources rated by the Ohio public. (2) The NEA poll ranks school officials eighth, while results of this survey indicate that school officials rank third as an information source in Ohio.

Some of Hubbell's assertions, which are based on findings from his local school district studies, are supported by the results of this survey. For example, Hubbell hypothesizes that the single, most important factor accounting for a respondent's assessment of the public schools is whether or not the respondent has children in the public school. Hubbell also hypothesizes that respondents are likely to give a more favorable rating to school personnel

they know on a day-to-day basis (teachers, for example) than to those they do not know personally (central office administrators, for example).

Results of this survey indicated that two factors were significantly associated with respondents' answers to most of the items: (1) whether or not the respondent had school-age children, and (2) whether or not the respondent was interested in learning about schools. These two variables were significantly correlated (beyond the .001 level), and it seems that the second is dependent upon the first. That is, the respondent's interest in learning about schools would seem to depend on whether or not the respondent has children in school. Respondents with children in school, when compared to respondents who did not have school-age children, were, in fact, more knowledgeable about schools, had more trust and confidence in Ohio public education, and rated the quality of education in the local school district higher.

Three other variables were associated with some of the responses to some of the items. The respondent's attendance at school functions, the amount of school information reported, and the accuracy and reliability of school information were associated with many of the responses to key questions. In general, respondents who attended school functions, who reported they received an adequate amount of school information, and who reported receiving accurate and reliable school information, were most interested in learning about schools, rated the quality of public education high, and said they had a high degree of trust and confidence in public education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The objective of this report was to assess how the Ohio public informs itself about schools. This objective has been accomplished through the

design, pilot-testing, and statewide administration of a telephone questionnaire. The Ohio Department of Education can now incorporate these survey results into its publicizing of future programs and services.

Perhaps the most important finding of the survey is that Hubbell's recent theory seems to be confirmed in the State of Ohio. Hubbell holds that the strongest supporters of public education are the parents of children in public schools. He argues that since people without school-age children now outnumber parents of school-age children (national figures indicate that only 33 percent of the population have school-age children) the primary task is to achieve more effective communication with the part of the population that does not have school-age children.

These survey results indicate that respondents without school-age children were, in fact, less interested in learning about schools, less knowledgeable about schools, gave lower ratings to the quality of schools, and placed lower trust and confidence in schools, when compared to respondents with school-age children. Perhaps more importantly, results indicate that people without school-age children use basically different information sources that do people with school-age children. Respondents without children in school primarily use the mass media to inform themselves about schools: TV, newspapers, and radio. Respondents with school-age children, on the other hand, use school-based information sources to learn about schools.

It seems that the Ohio SDE may want to increase its efforts to communicate to the public through the mass media. Public awareness campaigns, utilizing TV, newspapers and radio, and targeted for persons without school-age children, might effectively improve public support for education.

When asked to identify the one, most-preferable information source, respondents with and respondents without school-age children both named school-based information sources: school staff, school publications, and direct mailings from school. The Ohio SDE might want to recommend that LEA's design ways to communicate more effectively with people who do not have school-age children, using these three media.

It is also recommended that personnel designing public communications take into consideration our finding that, above all other characteristics, the public values information sources that are perceived as "accurate, valid, or reliable." The public also values sources that are perceived as being "direct and first-hand" and "face-to-face." In future research, the Ohio SDE might want to explore further how the public understands these characteristics. For example, how does the public define and perceive "accurate, valid, and reliable?" While respondents generally reported a high degree of accuracy and reliability in their school information, those who did not were less supportive of schools.

While respondents generally reported receiving an adequate amount of information, those respondents who did not were less supportive of schools. The Ohio SDE might want to consider increasing the volume of information they communicate about schools (particularly to people without school-age children). Possible guidelines for topic areas would be the responses to items in the questionnaire. Respondents especially indicated that they would like additional information about school board decisions, school budgets, career education, regular classrooms, and special education classrooms.

While a little more than half of the respondents indicated that they had attended a school function during the past year, those who had not were

less supportive of schools. It seems that the Ohio SDE might want to encourage LEA's to take steps to increase attendance at school functions, particularly among people without school-age children. Events especially designed for people without school-age children might be helpful in increasing support for schools among that part of the population.

The findings seem to confirm Hubbell's hypothesis that the public rates more highly those school personnel with whom they have had day-to-day contact. Therefore, if the SDE or LEA wishes to increase the public's rating of specific school officials (for example, administrators and school board members), they must make those school officials more visible.

Finally, it is recommended that the Ohio SDE revise the survey instrument as used in this study and recommend its use by local school districts in the conduct of local surveys.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Tables

Table 1

Sources of Information About Schools*	
Information Source	Percent Mentioning
Newspapers	41
Children	30
Neighbors and Friends (other than parents)	21
Radio and Television	19
Other Parents	15
Other Word of Mouth	10
Other Sources	11
Reports of School Officials	7
Never Get Any Information About Schools	6

*"The Teacher, NEA and the Quality of Education", A National Opinion Survey, Volume 1, April-June 1978. (Cantril Research, Inc., Washington, D.C.)

Table 2

Public School
Information Sources*

Information Source	1969 Percent Mentioning	1979 Percent Mentioning
Local Newspaper	38	37
Radio and TV	16	21
School Publications/ Newsletters	8	7
Word of Mouth/Personal Involvement, etc.	60	70
Don't Know, No Answers	6	8

*"The Eleventh Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools", PHI DELTA KAPPAN, September 1979, pp. 33-45.

Table 3

Respondents with and without School-Age Children

	# Respondents Mentioning	% Respondents Mentioning
With School-Age Children	182	47
Without School-Age Children	207	53
No Response	1	0
	390	100

Table 4

Attendance at Any School Function During Past Year

	# Respondents Mentioning	% Respondents Mentioning
Attended	219	56
Did Not Attend	171	44
	390	100

Table 5

Kinds of School-Related Events Attended
During Past Year

Event	# Respondents Mentioning	% Respondents Mentioning
Music-Related Event	65	30
Sporting Event	59	27
Club Meetings, Open Houses, and/or Demonstrations	55	25
PTA/PTO Meetings	51	23
Teacher Conferences	24	11
Drama-Related Event	21	10
Fund-Raising Events	7	3
Graduation Ceremonies	6	3
Classroom Visitation	6	3
Respondents Employed by School	4	2
Board Meetings	2	1
Public Information Meeting	1	.5
	301	138.5*

*This was a multiple response option item accounting for the total exceeding 100%.

Table 6

Respondents' Interest in Learning About Schools

Level of Interest	# Respondents Mentioning	% Respondents Mentioning	
Very Low Interest	23	6	
Low Interest	54	14	
Moderate Interest	157	40	Mean = 3.29 S.D. = 1.07
High Interest	96	25	
Very High Interest	60	15	
	390	100	

Table 7

School Information Sources Used by Respondents

Information Source	# Respondents Mentioning	% Respondents Mentioning
Newspaper	306	78
Friends, Relatives, Neighbors	273	70
School Publications, Reports, Newspapers	231	59
Radio	213	55
TV	211	54
School Staff/Teachers	205	53
Direct Mail	186	48
PTA/PTO	183	47
Children in School	171	44
Other	4	1

Table 8

Most-Used Single Information Sources
Mentioned by Respondents

Information Source	# Respondents Mentioning	% Respondents Mentioning
Newspaper	74	19
Own Children	64	16
School Publications, Reports, Newspapers	48	12
Friends, Relatives, and Neighbors	46	12
School Staff Members	38	10
PTA/PTO, Parent Conference	31	8
Direct Mail	25	6
TV	24	6
Radio	17	4
Other	6	2
More Than One of Above	3	1
No Response	14	4
	390	100

Table 9

Most-Preferred Single Information Sources
Mentioned by Respondents

Information Source	# Respondents Mentioning	% Respondents Mentioning
School Staff Members/Teachers	86	22
Newspapers	59	15
School Publications, Reports, and Newspapers	46	12
More Than One	37	10
Own School Children	33	8
PTA/PTO, Parent Conferences	28	7
Direct Mail	26	7
Friends, Relatives, and Neighbors	21	5
TV	14	3
Radio	13	3
Other	8	2
No Response	19	5
	390	99*

*Does not total 100% because of rounding.

Table 10

Characteristics Most Valued by Respondents
in an Information Source

Characteristic	#Respondents	% Responses
Accurate, Valid, Reliable Source	142	35
Most Available, Convenient Source	66	16
Most Direct, Firsthand Source	49	12
Face-to-Face Contact	38	9
Most Complete Information Source	35	9
Family Source	13	3
Printed Medium	13	3
Live Coverage	2	.5
Other	8	2
No Response	42	10
	408	99.5*

*Figure does not total 100% because of rounding.

Table 11

Respondents' Assessment of Adequacy
of School Information Received
During the Past Year

Adequacy	# Respondents Mentioning	% Respondents Mentioning	
Very Inadequate	10	3	
Inadequate	73	19	
Neither Adequate nor Inadequate	57	15	Mean = 3.53 S.D. = 1.02
Adequate	197	50	
Very Adequate	52	13	
No Response	1	.5	
	390	100.5*	

*Exceeds 100% because of rounding.

Table 12

Respondents' Assessment of the
Accuracy and Reliability of School
Information Received During the Past Year

Accuracy	# Respondents Mentioning	% Respondents Mentioning	
Very Inaccurate	6	2	
Inaccurate	20	5	
Neither Accurate Nor Inaccurate	86	22	Mean = 3.80
Accurate	203	52	S.D. = .84
Very Accurate	70	18	
No Response	5	1	
	390	100	

Table 13

Respondents' Rating of the Quality
of Local School District Education

Quality of Local School District Education	# Respondents Mentioning	% Respondents Mentioning
Very bad	13	3
Bad	40	10
Neither Bad nor Good	101	26
Good	155	40
Very Good	78	20
No Response	3	1
	390	100

Mean = 3.63
S.D. = 1.02

Table 14

Respondents' Evaluation of Quality
of Local District Education Compared
to Education in the Nation's Schools

Quality of Local School District Education	# Respondents Mentioning	% Respondents Mentioning	
Much Worse	5	1	
Worse	27	7	
Neither Better nor Worse	182	47	
			Mean = 3.42
Better	131	34	S.D. = .80
Much Better	33	8	
No Response	12	4	
	390	101*	

*Total exceeds 100% due to rounding.

Table 15

Respondents' Degree of Trust and Confidence
in the Nation's School System

Degree of Trust and Confidence	# Respondents Mentioning	% Respondents Mentioning
Very Low	26	7
Low	95	24
Neither High nor Low	162	42
High	89	23
Very High	13	3
No Response	5	1
	390	100

Mean = 2.91
S.D. = .93

Table 16

Respondents' Degree of Trust and Confidence
in the Ohio Public Education System

Degree of Trust and Confidence	# Respondents Mentioning	% Respondents Mentioning
Very Low	16	4
Low	43	11
Neither High nor Low	200	51
High	110	28
Very High	13	3
No Response	8	2
	390	99*

Mean = 3.15
S.D. = .82

*Total does not equal 100% due to rounding.

Table 17

Topic Area in which Respondents
Want Additional Information

Information Category	# Respondents Mentioning	% Respondents Mentioning
School Board Decisions	295	76
School Budget	275	71
Career Education	260	67
Regular Classroom Programs	257	66
Special Education Programs	257	66
Student Test Score Data	220	56
Adult and Community Education Programs	214	55
Class Size	189	48
Other	10	3

Table 18

Most Mentioned Sources of Information Used by
Respondents with School-Age Children,
Compared to Respondents Without School-Age Children

	With Children	Without Children
Information Sources Used	1. Own Child 2. School Publications 3. Newspapers 4. PTA	1. TV 2. Newspapers 3. Friends 4. Radio

Table 19

Most Mentioned Sources of Information Preferred
by Respondents with School-Age Children,
Compared to Respondents without School-Age Children

	With Children	Without Children
Information Sources Preferred	1. School Staff 2. Own Child 3. School Publications 4. Newspapers 5. PTA	1. Newspapers 2. School Staff 3. School Publications 4. Friends 5. Direct Mail

APPENDIX B

Sample Selection, Sample Limitations, and Error Estimates

This Appendix is a memorandum from Dr. Victor Wall of the OSU to the author. The memo addresses in detail the limitations of the sampling design used for this study. The memo is included to clarify for the reader the extent to which the findings of this study are generalizable.

To: A.E.L.

From: Victor D. Wall Jr.

Re: Sample Selection, Sample Limitations and Error Estimates.

A. Sample Selection

Sample was drawn by the Polimetrics Laboratory at the Ohio State University. The sample conforms to the following characteristics:

1. All telephones in the State of Ohio are stored in their computer. The laboratory has contractual arrangements with all the telephone companies for regular up-dates of existing telephones.

   From this list (including unlisted numbers) known places of business are deleted.

2. Through a computer-based program (STATESAM) telephone numbers are randomly selected in accordance with the size sample being requested. The largest counties within the state (Cuyahoga, Hamilton, Franklin and Montgomery) are stratified to ensure a proportionate representation. The remaining telephone numbers are randomly selected.

3. Thus the sample represents an adequate random sampling of telephones within the State of Ohio. (Note: the procedures described above do not ensure, nor indeed should they, a proportionate sampling of each county. The process is random, the sample size relatively small, and proportionate representation will be affected by any number of other aspects of the study, e.g., willingness of subjects to respond, being at home, telephone disconnects, etc.)

B. Sample Size and Error Rates.

1. The sample drawn was intended to provide generalizable data to the State of Ohio with respect to sources of education-related information. The household (as represented by a telephone number) was the basic sampling unit. As such, the sample does not provide data generalizable to specific sub-group targets. This occurs for following reasons:

   A. The sample drawn was random, not stratified for particular sub-group characteristics. This allows generalizations to the State as a Whole only.

   B. The sample size (N = 390) provides sufficient cell frequencies for generalization to the total population. However, sub-group analysis within the sample (e.g., Blacks as compared to Whites) will be only suggestive of trends which might provide the basis for further study. For adequate generalization one needs 385 responses in each cell being compared.

2. Below is a table of sampling error percentages used by the Polimetrics laboratory (developed by Gallup). The table indicates the confidence level (95%) one may have that the sampling error is not larger than the figures (in percentage points) shown for each of the percentages.

	SAMPLE SIZE						
	1500	1000	750	600	400	200	100
% near 10	2	2	3	4	4	5	7
% near 20	2	3	4	4	5	7	9
% near 30	3	4	4	4	6	8	10
% near 40	3	4	4	5	6	9	11
% near 50	3	4	4	5	6	9	11
% near 60	3	4	4	5	6	9	11
% near 70	3	4	4	4	6	8	10
% near 80	2	3	4	4	5	7	9
% near 90	2	2	3	4	4	5	7

Thus for the sample drawn (N = 390), the error rate for percentages will range from 4 to 6 percent.

3. Given the framework of error, sample size and sample selection described above, a check was run on the obtained sample to determine the extent to which county proportions of completed calls conformed to estimated county populations.[1]

As a check on the top four counties (Cuyahoga, Hamilton, Franklin and Montgomery), the estimated proportion of population was compared to the sample proportion of responsdents from those counties.

Estimated Proportion	Sample Proportion
36%	30%

While there is a 6% difference in the two proportions, the difference is not signicant. (Note: z-score compison yields 1.76, need 1.96 at the .05 level. Calculation assumed an N = 390 for both Sample and Estimated Proportions.) For purposes of within sample analysis the counties were broken down into five categories. Below is a comparison of their proportions.

[1]Sources of estimates are from the Ohio Department of Economic and Community Development, Office of Research. They in turn base their projections on data published by the Bureau of Census.

	Estimated Proportion	Sample Proportion
Category 1 (Counties under 50,000)	11.89%	11.50%
Category 2 (50,001 to 75,000)	06.64%	13.30%
Category 3 (75,001 to 100,000)	08.87%	15.40%
Category 4 (100,001 to 250,100)	17.70%	14.10%
Category 5 (Over 250,101)	54.46%	44.40%

z-score comparisons of the proportions above were not made insofar as one would expect variations between the figures as a result of the random nature of the telephone selection process. For those counties which were proportionately represented however, no differences of statistical significance obtained.

C. Demographic Comparisons between Sample and Estimated Population.

1. Education Levels

	Sample	1970 Census[2]
Less than High School	18.80%	46.7%
High School Graduate	36.07%	35.3%
Some College	24.20%	8.7%
College Graduate	13.70%	5.3%
Graduate Degree	5.70%	4.0%
No Response	.90%	

Direct comparisons above are complicated by the 9 year time difference, by the telephone vs house visits methods of data collection and by the normal sampling error rates. However, as a face validity check, the direction of differences are consistent with expectations. (I.e., fewer people with with less H/S, More College Grads, Some College and Graduate Degree categories in the Sample.)

2. Age Categories

Sample		1970 Census[3]		
18-24	10.00%	10-14	13.01%	
25-39	41.03%	15-19	11.74%	
40-55	25.13%	20-24	9.48%	Σ = 29.17%
Over 55	23.85%	25-29	7.95%	
		30-39	13.63%	
		40-44	7.41%	
		45-54	14.32%	
		55 & Over	22.44%	

(Percentages derived by deleting those 9 years and under.)

[2] 1970 Census of Population: General Social and Economic Characteristic of Ohio, Published by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Social and Statistics Administration, Bureau of the Census. 1972. p. 326.
[3] Ibid., p. 328.

Again, direct comparisons are complicated for the same reasons mentioned for Education Levels. The 1970 Census 10-14 year category was included to compare to 1979's sample category of 18-24. One would expect a rough similarity between the two if all variables remained equal over the 9 year time difference. (e.g., the 1970 10-14 bracket nine years later would be similar to the 18-24 category (19-23) of the sample.) The same visual inspection applies to the 15-19,20-24, and 25-29 Census comparison of the Sample's 25-29 category. Two categories appear to be quite different, Sample categories 25-39 and comparable categories adjusted for the 9 year time lag in the 70 Census. E.g., 41.03% to 29.17% and the Over 55 categories, 23.85% in Sample and 36.76% in the Census. The 11% difference in the former may be accounted for by sampling error and population changes and the difference in the latter by the same problems in addition to an expected higher rate of death.

3. Income Levels

	Sample		Spot Rates [4]
Under $7000	12.56%		---Not Given
$7000 -$14999	25.90%	$8000 - $14999	31.00%
$15000 - $24999	32.82%	$15000 - $24999	32.30%
$25000 - $34999	15.13%	$25000 and Over	30.9%
Over $35000	5.64%		
No Response	7.95%		

The $7000-14999 categories deviate by 6%, the $1500-24999 by .5% and the Over $25000 by 10%. 7.95% of sample refused to answer.

4. Ethnic Categories

	Sample	Spot Rates
White	91.28%	88.81%
Black	4.36%	10.30%
Hispanic	0.00%	.89%
Indian (Am)	1.54%	Not Given
Other/No Response	2.56%	-------

Discrepancies here are, as above, to be expected given intent and sampling procedures of study.

5. Sex Differences

	Sample	1970 Census
Male	22.56%	48.465%
Female	77.44%	51.534%

The wide discrepancies noted above would, if sample had been stratified to permit generalization to male/female sub-groups, created serious external validity problems. However, in the

[4] Spot Radio Rates and Data, published by Standard Rate and Data Service, Vol 61, No. 9, Sept. 1, 1979 pp.647-649.

case of this sample, these differences should not significantly alter its overall generalizability. The reasons for this are as follows:

1. Households provided the basic sampling unit in relation to the questions being asked (e.g., sources of education related information). The assumption was made that sexual differences would not be a significant factor affecting the answer to the question. That is, since our concern was with how the household received information, not men or women within the household, little effort was made to systematically keep these proportions equal.

   (In fact one might well argue that if the question is to be adequately answered one is compelled to sample more women than men. This due to social differences in the roles of men and women.)

2. It was also assumed that Husband and Wife would communicate with each other on matters affecting their children and the school.

To empirically check the assumption that sex difference in this study would not significantly affect its outcome, all possible internal comparisons between men and women were made. Of the 74 comparisons, only 8 (10.81%) were statistically significant (.05 level). The eight are as follows:

1. Answers to WHY they marked their responses to Question 24 (Describe the trust and confidence you have in your local school district administration) the way they did.

2. Answer to "what the school board can do to in-increase trust and confidence" were different

3. Answers to WHY for Question 28 (Trust and confi-in local teachers) the way they did.

4. Answers to three parts of question 6 (where they receive school related information): Information received from (a) Friends, (b) Newspapers, and (c) School Publications. In all cases proportionately more of the "YES" responses were women. However, both groups had more "Yes" than "No."

5. Answers to the Question; (14) Do you know the local principal of the school nearest you? also suggested differences. Of the "Yes" responses, a greater proportion were women, again however, both groups had a greater proportion of "No" responses.

6. Finally, there was a significant difference in occupation listings as would be expected regardless of sample size.

All other comparisons failed to yield any significant differences.

To further check the validity of the no-differences assumption, all questions yielding continuous, scaled answers were compared. Means and Standard Deviations were calculated and tested for significance. None were found to be statistically significant. Means and Standard Deviations are listed below.

	MEN	WOMEN
Question 9 (Satisfied with Amount of Information)		
Mean	2.5454	2.4433
S.D.	1.1235	.9950
Question 10 (Info Accuracy and Reliability)		
Mean	2.3448	2.1481
S.D.	.8999	.8291
Question 17 (Interest in Learning about School)		
Mean	2.8295	2.6644
S.D.	1.0195	1.0879
Question 18 (Quality of Ed. in District)		
Mean	2.4090	2.3557
S.D.	1.0129	1.0287
Question 19 (District compared to U.S.)		
Mean	2.5454	2.5833
S.D.	8152	.7963
Question 20 (Trust in Nation's Ed. System)		
Mean	3.2528	3.1178
S.D.	.9177	.8907
Question 22 (Trust in Ohio's Ed. System)		
Mean	2.8045	2.8537
S.D.	.8738	.8109
Question 24 (Trust in Local Administration)		
Mean	2.6000	2.5357
S.D.	.8338	.8585
Question 26 (Trust in Local School Board)		
Mean	2.6040	2.6420
S.D.	.8166	.7987
Question 28 (Trust in Local Teachers)		
Mean	2.4827	2.4879
S.D.	.8742	.9371

All things considered, the findings above lend credibility to the no-differences assumption within the sample. (Note: one must make this assumption with respect to the sample. Even if the proportions had been controlled for in the data gathering procedure, sex generalization to the population would have been tenuous at best.) However, there appears to be little reason to suspect population differences given the limitations described above.

6. Children in School

	Sample	1970 Census
Households with Children in Sch.	46.67%	56.09%
Households without Children in School	53.08%	43.91%

Again, figures based on 1970 census are dated, but the differences are in the expected direction.

Finally, a word about Telephone surveys.

A. Telephone surveys are limited, by definition, to that group of people who have phones, are willing to take the time to respond, are at home when called, and whose phone is functioning. All reasonable care was taken (call backs, time of day called, etc.) to ensure as accurate a sampling as possible within the time and cost limitations framework.

B. There is an obvious trade-off between telephone survey and house-to-house interviewing. The former is relatively inexpensive while the latter will increase 4-6 fold the financial cost, and approximately 8 fold the time factor.

C. If one's interest is (a) ensuring demographic comparability in the sample and population, and (b) creating a sample from which one may generalize from the sample to the population sub-groups, then the cost/time trade-off becomes critical. Sample size, at minimum will have to double on a single demographic characteristic which correspondingly increases both time and cost. There is also a generalizability problem associated with such an endeavor. As one "stacks" the demographic deck to achieve population proportions, one becomes less random in the selection process and consequently more biased. (Generalizability is based on the assumption of random selection, not on matched population proportions.)

My past experience with surveys, as well as my colleague's, is that even with other topics one can expect at best a 15 to 25% Male response and a 50% return on the minorities unless specific measures are adopted to counter-act this tendency.

APPENDIX C

Percentage Distribution of Random Sample
by Phone Directory

Percentage Distribution of Random Sample by Phone Directory

Phone Directory	% of Sample (Relative Frequency)	Cumulative Relative Frequency
Cleveland	13.7	100.0
Cincinnati and Hamilton County	11.3	86.3
Columbus	9.2	75.0
Toledo and Vicinity	5.2	65.8
Dayton and Vicinity	5.0	60.6
Akron	4.7	55.6
Brookville	4.2	50.9
Marion	4.0	46.7
Sandusky and Vicinity	3.7	42.7
Canton	3.5	39.0
Youngstown	2.5	35.5
Cadiz-Tiltonsville	2.2	33.0
Wilmington	2.2	30.8
Painesville-Eastlake-Mentor-Willoughby	2.0	28.6
Wadsworth-Montrose	2.0	26.6
Cortland	1.7	24.6
Norwalk	1.7	22.9
Bellaire-Martins Ferry-Bridgeport & St	1.5	21.2
Georgetown	1.5	19.7
Springfield and Vicinity	1.5	18.2
Bellevue-Clyde	1.2	16.7
Hudson-Chardon-Western Reserve	1.2	15.5
Lancaster and Vicinity	1.0	14.3
Lima and Vicinity	1.0	13.3
Lorain	1.0	12.3
Mansfield and Vicinity	1.0	11.3
Middletown-Franklin-Monroe-Trenton	1.0	10.3
Oxford	1.0	9.3
Wapakoneta	1.0	8.3
Wooster	1.0	7.3
Elyria and Vicinity	0.7	6.3
Kent-Ravenna and Vicinity	0.7	5.6
Ripley-Aberdeen and Vicinity	0.7	4.9
Warren	0.7	4.2
Xenia and Vicinity	0.7	3.5
Delphos	0.5	2.8
Sunbury-Galena/Delaware-Plain City	0.5	2.3
Albany/Jackson	0.2	1.8
Arcadia/Bowling Green	0.2	1.6
Bloomdale and Area/Bowling Green	0.2	1.4
Creston/Wooster	0.2	1.2
Minford-Stockdale/Portsmouth	0.2	1.0
North Lewisburg/Delaware-Plain City	0.2	.8
Ottoville/Grover Hill	0.2	.6
Ripley/Georgetown	0.2	.4
West Salem/Ashland-Loudonville	0.2	.2